

# Nude beach Hanlan's Point is all that's good about Toronto: Shawn Micallef

Hanlan's Point, the clothing-optional beach on Toronto Island, is the barest expression of freedom we have and the kind of openness good cities provide.

By **SHAWN MICALLEF** Living Columnist

Thu., June 14, 2012

On any hot Saturday or Sunday, some of Toronto's beaches will have you convinced we live in Southern California. Thousands converge on Bluffer's Park, Ashbridge's Bay, Cherry Beach and the Toronto Islands.

The Islands are different though because getting there takes a little more effort. Romantics like to say the ferry ride over makes it feel like you're going far away from the city, but the antiquated system's mercurial schedule and long chaotic lines can sometimes result in spoiled days and even fistfights, on occasion.

Once on the Island, everything is fine and the most popular beach is the [clothing-optional one at Hanlan's Point](#). It's everything that's good about Toronto.

This beach is a revolutionary rebuke of the uptightness that long dominated Ontario and Toronto. Hanlan's Point may be the barest expression of freedom we have and the kind of openness good cities provide.

[The water is clean](#), too. Swim far out and see ripples of sand deep below. Take accidental gulps of Lake Ontario, as I have for years, and you'll be fine. You won't even glow in the dark.

We don't usually see naked people in Toronto's public spaces, and on a first trip it might be disconcerting, but soon, unless you're particularly uptight, it becomes surprisingly normal.

People in Vancouver like to celebrate their very nice [Wreck Beach](#) as an expression of laid back West Coast culture, the kind of place a naked hippy will sell you a clandestine Caesar, complete with celery stalk, while you lay on the sand and look at the ocean.

Over the last decade or so, since it was officially declared clothing-optional, Hanlan's has developed its own beach culture — though it is perhaps a little more urban than Wreck, considering the CN Tower is always in view and it has the Toronto mix.

All sorts of people are here: goths and hipsters, nerds, Bay St. lawyers, new Canadians, families with naked kids, the gay and not so gay, and, well, everybody else. Hanlan's is also where body-image hang-ups don't seem to matter. Whether tall or small, double-sized or with ripped abs, the kind of body a person has doesn't correspond with who takes off their clothes.

That too, is left to choice, which makes the leathery-skinned hardcore nudists grumpy, but that's the price of freedom.

On quiet weekdays there are more naked people than not, but on the busy weekends it runs about 40-to-60 naked-to-covered. Covered may mean a loincloth or Victorian bathing costume. Groups of friends might be shy around each other at first, but over time [one or two will give in and and skinny dip](#). Hanlan's is the gateway to European-style looseness in a city that struggles with this all the time.

The lake may be the wilderness but you can rent chair and umbrella from somebody with one of the few jobs in the city where clothes aren't required. A drink can be had at the nearby Mermaid Café. And since it's west facing, Hanlan's has one of the best nuclear sunsets in the city, disappearing into the smoggy Etobicoke and Mississauga skylines.

*Shawn Micallef writes every Friday about life in the GTA. Wander the streets with him on Twitter [@shawnmicallef](#)*